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PILOT CURRICULUM PROGRAM PHASE II: 2005-2006

*Italian Heritage Curriculum: "The Universality of Italian Heritage"*

## Unit Four: Kindergarten & First Grades

### "The Legend of La Befana -- The Italian Christmas Witch"

#### **Grades K-1**

*Social Studies/Language Arts (Folklore)/World Languages*

#### **Purpose:**

The students will be able to:

1. Identify the traditions of the Italian Christmas.
2. Compare and contrast the celebrations of the Italian Epiphany and The Three Kings celebration of Puerto Rico.

#### **Materials:**

- A world map or globe
- Poster board or black board
- Access to the internet
- Access to a library
- Writing paper
- Drawing paper

#### **Theme:**

The holiday legend of "La Befana" is one of Italy's oldest and widely celebrated Christmas traditions. "La Befana" is sometimes described as a "good" witch, which children can understand as being similar to the Wizard of Oz's Good Witch. According to the original legend, "La Befana" was an old woman, probably in ancient Israel, who had the good fortune to meet the three Wise Men coming from the Orient to visit the Christ Child. When she was unable to accompany them in their journey, she tried to seek the child herself to bring him gifts. Not knowing which baby was the Christ Child, she gave each child she visited a gift. In keeping with this legend, Italian children eagerly await presents from La Befana on January 6<sup>th</sup> of each year, which is the Feast of the Epiphany.

Given that State and national curriculum standards ask that students be exposed to the cultures and celebrations of other countries, the legend of "La Befana" is an interesting celebration for comparisons to other countries. While the Christmas celebration is a very important holiday in countries such as Italy and Puerto Rico, both cultures place a special emphasis of the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated twelve days later. Through this lesson plan, students will investigate the Italian gift-giver, Befana, and compare her to the American icon Santa Claus. They also will compare the Italian celebration with the American Christmas celebration. This lesson help students better understand the Italian tradition, along with understanding the Puerto Rican tradition of sharing gifts during the Feast of the Three Kings. They will see that the tradition of sharing gifts at Christmas or at Epiphany originated with the story of the astrologers from the East traveling to find the baby Jesus in Judea.

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For more background on La Befana, the Feast of the Epiphany and celebration of the Epiphany in Puerto Rico, the please visit the following websites provided in the complete lesson plan.

### **Activities:**

- I. Introduce the lesson by identifying Italy and Puerto Rico on a world map or globe.
  - a. Explain to the students that you will be discussing holiday folklore and traditions from these two countries.
- II. Discuss with the class and list on poster board or a black board the features and traditions of the Italian Christmas season.
- III. Explain the history behind the Epiphany.
- IV. Parallel the identities of La Befana and Santa Claus.
- V. Discuss with the class and list on poster board or a black board the features and traditions of the Puerto Rican Christmas season.
- VI. Create a Venn diagram on poster board to compare and contrast the two celebrations:
  - a. A Venn diagram is a chart that has two large interlocking circles that creates three spaces.
  - b. Label the left space "Italy".
    - i. Events or identities from only the Italian holiday should be placed here.
  - c. The middle space should contain any similarities between the two celebrations.
  - d. Label the right space "Puerto Rico".
    - i. Events or identities from the Puerto Rican holiday should be placed here.
  - e. Have the students help you to place the features of the two celebrations in their proper places.
    - i. Use the lists you made earlier from which to draw your information.
- VII. Have the students complete a writing exercise.
  - a. Your grade level's ability will determine how you proceed.
  - b. Younger students may want to write a simple sentence and draw a picture.
    - i. Older students may be able to write a more detailed paragraph.
  - ii. Use the following writing prompt:
    1. The Three Wise Men were on a journey to honor and give special gifts to the Christ Child.
    2. What sort of present would you give to someone who is very important to you? Why?